

Michigan Department of Human Services workers: Hurricane Katrina, a reminder of the work done in Michigan communities every day

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I want to share the story of the lives of our staff in metropolitan Detroit Department of Human Services offices in the days following the hurricane. DHS offices serving Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties began to work with community partners in early September to serve refugees arriving from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

In Detroit, Wayne County DHS worked with Michigan State Police, Detroit and Wayne County Homeland Security to open and staff a reception center in Detroit. From Sept. 14-Oct. 18 the center served 861 evacuees as DHS worked with partners to administer emergency assistance, medical and human services. Many families that sought emergency services when first arriving returned to the center for more long-term assistance as DHS staff in the center worked with agencies not normally associated with human services – including the U.S. Post Office, Veteran’s Administration and Detroit-Wayne County schools – to deliver important services.

Oakland County DHS worked in partnership with churches, community leaders and providers – including the Red Cross and county emergency service agencies – to help more than 400 evacuees find housing, emergency assistance and human services through the Oakland County Hurricane Reception and Assessment Center. The majority of evacuees were placed in Southfield hotels and 60-65 children from evacuating families enrolled in county schools. Some 93 percent of evacuees coming to Oakland County were from Louisiana.

Macomb County DHS worked with Macomb County Emergency Management to help 162 evacuees relocate to the county. Two local hotels were very helpful in meeting evacuees needs. The Ministerial Alliance organized a one-stop shop to help evacuees apply for resources in the county. The county Homeless Coalition was a valuable housing resource while doctors from St. Joseph Hospital and members of Salvation Army, Traveler’s Aid and Macomb St. Clair Workforce Development all helped out during this critical time.

Each county forged new partnerships while serving almost 1,500 evacuees in the metropolitan area. This is the kind of work DHS staff do every day to help people in our communities who are most in need. One positive outcome of the Gulf Coast hurricanes has been an increasing dialogue about poverty in America. I hope another positive outcome is to help our Michigan communities see more clearly the jewel that exists in every county in Michigan, our committed and caring Department of Human Services staff that served almost 2,300 hurricane evacuees statewide.

- For more information on what the Department of Humans Services, go to <http://www.michigan.gov/dhs> and click on “Hurricane Katrina Relief”.